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ABSTRACT

This report is the first step in a multi-year effort to identify and demonstrate community-based strategies for helping family, friend, and neighbor caregivers meet the needs of working parents, their children, and employers. Information for the report was obtained through interviews with experts, employers, employees, and their caregivers. The introductory section defines family, friend, and neighbor care and suggests that family support strategies may be an effective framework for addressing quality. The remainder of the report is presented in four sections. Section 1 presents highlights from interviews and suggests promising strategies for sharing information, connecting caregivers, and creating community connections. Interview findings reveal that many parents chose informal care because it was the only option with the flexibility needed to help parents meet their job responsibilities. Many informal caregivers felt isolated and lacked easy access to information about child development and early learning, peer connections, and educational materials. Many excellent community resources are not well-coordinated, known, or accessible to working families, caregivers, or employers. Retail managers appreciated the child care challenges their employees face and want to help, but did not know how to connect with community resources. Experts noted that informal caregivers can have unique strengths and challenges. Section 2 describes model initiatives focused on improving the quality of informal child care. Section 3 delineates recommended actions by communities, retailers, policymakers, and funders to improve informal care. The concluding section of the report suggests a range of public policy questions for investigation. Appended are lists of potential partners for making community connections, suggested actions, and experts contributing to the report. (Contains 12 endnotes.) (KB)

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Community-Based Strategies for Helping Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers Meet the Needs of Employees, Their Children and Employers

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In Partnership with the
NRF Retail Work Life Forum

SPARKING CONNECTIONS

Community-Based Strategies for Helping Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers Meet the Needs of Employees, Their Children and Employers

Deborah Stahl
Nina Sazer O'Donnell
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Our special thanks to the
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About This Initiative

*Sparking Connections**: *Community-Based Strategies for Helping Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers Meet the Needs of Employees, Their Children and Employers* is an initiative that is identifying and demonstrating community-based strategies for helping family, friend and neighbor caregivers meet the needs of working parents, their children and employers. This initiative is being conducted in partnership with the NRF Retail Work Life Forum.

Initiative goals are to:

expand the knowledge base about how to enhance the child care provided by family, friend and neighbor caregivers, including roles that retailers and other employers can play;

design, demonstrate and document strategies to support a productive workforce by connecting employees and their family, friend and neighbor caregivers to useful community resources; and

share what is learned with employers, families, communities, funders and policy makers throughout the nation.

This four-year initiative has three phases:

An *Investigation Phase*, including a literature review; collection of best practice examples; interviews with employers, employees, caregivers and experts; and this published report on what is learned.

A two-year *Demonstration and Evaluation Phase* in partnership with communities that will use and evaluate promising strategies for helping family, friend, and neighbor caregivers.

A *Dissemination Phase* to broadly share effective strategies and lessons learned.

For more information about this initiative please contact:

Families and Work Institute, www.familiesandwork.org.

*In January 2000, **Families and Work Institute** and the **National Latino Children's Institute** hosted an early childhood public engagement conference in Los Angeles, California, titled *Sparking the Connections: la familia, los niños y la comunidad*. This initiative continues in the spirit of that conference with the idea that connections need to be "sparked" in many ways to encourage early learning and school readiness.

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Acknowledgements

This initiative was created in partnership with the NRF Retail Work Life Forum, a group of retail employers working to find solutions to issues of concern for their workforce. Thanks to the generous support of Providian Financial Services Corporation, this report is the first step in a multi-year effort to identify and demonstrate community-based strategies for helping family, friend and neighbor caregivers meet the needs of working parents, their children and employers.

This report reflects the contributions of many people. Our thanks go to:

Providian Financial Services Corporation—and Kathy Bogle-Shields—for believing in this initiative and strongly supporting it from the beginning.

The companies comprising the NRF Retail Work Life Forum for their insights that helped shape this project and for being very involved partners—from arranging interviews with managers, employee-parents and their caregivers to serving on local demonstration project advisory committees.

The many experts and innovative thinkers in the fields of early childhood education, family support and community support who talked with us and generously shared their ideas, experiences and hopes for the future (see Appendix for list of contributing experts).

Our colleagues at Families and Work Institute—Ellen Galinsky, President; Terry Bond, Vice President and Director, Work-Life Programs; and Stacey Rubinstein, Program Associate, whose insight and support were invaluable. And a special thanks to John Boose, for his elegant and artful graphic design.

Greg Gollaher, Gollaher Consulting Group, for his inspired illustrations.

Families and Work Institute

Families and Work Institute (FWI) is a non-profit research center that provides data to inform decision-making on the changing workforce, family and community. Founded in 1989, FWI is known for ahead of the curve, non-partisan research into emerging work-life issues; for solutions-oriented studies addressing topics of vital importance to all sectors of society; and for fostering connections among workplaces, families, and communities. FWI's rigorous data are highly respected. Its research, which has influenced decisions across the nation, is used by business and community leaders, policy makers, individual families, educators and the media. For more information, please see our Web site at www.familiesandwork.org.

National Retail Federation

As the world's largest retail trade association, the NRF's mission is to conduct programs and services in research, education, training, information technology, and government affairs to protect and advance the interests of the retail industry. NRF's membership includes the leading department, specialty, independent, discount, and mass merchandise stores in the United States and 50 nations around the world. The NRF Retail Work Life Forum examines such issues as child care, elder care, and financial planning initiatives that will give the hourly employee assistance in solving the problems that prevent them from working their schedule. For more information, please see their Web site at www.nrf.com.

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A Message for Retailers

The members of the NRF Retail Work Life Forum are proud to have supported this research project that will foster best practices addressing child care needs of hourly employees. This research seeks to promote the availability and quality of child care that is provided by family, friends and neighbors, and used by the majority of retail employees with child care arrangements.

For many working parents, seeking and maintaining employment is based on the ability to connect with and sustain workable solutions to their child care needs. This report and future phases of this initiative are designed to build bridges between retailers, parents and state and local resources within their communities. The goal is to identify replicable solutions to increase availability, quality and stability of family, friend and neighbor care by connecting employees and their child care providers to useful community resources. In return, retailers may hope to improve employee retention, productivity and morale.

The retail industry is working to become a career field of choice. In order to achieve this goal, creating an environment that is supportive for today's hourly employee is important. Influencing the connection between employees and community-based strategies that support the needs of working parents is an important effort. We are asking you to read this report and challenge yourself and your company in this effort to make a difference within the industry on these critically important issues.

You are invited to become involved in the project by actively participating in some of the pilot programs or by providing feedback. Your company's participation is also welcome in the NRF's Retail Work Life Forum where retailers meet regularly to discuss the work-life issues in the retail environment. We welcome your feedback and participation.

Introduction

Do you take care of your niece, nephew, grandchild or a neighbor's child while his or her parents are working? Did your grandmother take care of you after kindergarten? Does a relative or other adult pick up your child from school when you have to work overtime? Are you a manager with employees who rely on relatives to care for their children? If so, family, friend, and neighbor child care is or has been a part of your life. It touches almost all of us in some way.

While many children are cared for in licensed child care centers, preschools, or licensed family child care homes while their parents work, the majority of children in the United States are cared for by family, friends, or neighbors in settings that are, for the most part, not regulated. In addition, more children in low income families and more babies and toddlers are in this type of care than in licensed centers and homes. Many families rely on family, friend and neighbor care as their full-time child care arrangement, while others use it part-time, or as part of a patchwork of multiple care and education arrangements.

The fact that many employees rely on family, friends and neighbors to care for their children while they work also affects a company's bottom line. Employers are challenged by the instability and loss of productivity that occurs when this type of care breaks down and employees can't come to work. And, when employees are distracted by worries about whether their child is well cared for, learning and safe, they are less able to focus and meet the demands of their jobs.

As public awareness of the importance of the early years increases, so have policy responses. An increasing number of states and communities want young children to be ready to succeed when they get to school and are investing in early learning and preschool programs. This interest in school readiness has increased as education becomes more accountable—children who don't get a good start in life may not do as well on their third grade tests and beyond. And students who do well in school are more likely to become productive members of our nation's communities and future workforce.

Most systemic efforts to address school readiness focus on improving and expanding regulated or *formal* education and care programs. As essential as these are to achieving the common goal of *all children ready to succeed at school*, we must also pay attention to the many children who are not in these regulated settings to reach our national goal.

We now know more than ever before about how young children learn and grow. Science has demonstrated that children are learning from the moment they are born and this learning happens best when children:

- are safe and healthy;
- feel their parents, teachers and caregiver(s) really know and care about them;

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are encouraged to be curious; and

are helped to learn—from how to love books and language, to how to get along with others.

We also know that these things are most likely to occur when:

families have access to affordable health care before and after the birth of their children;

parents have information and supports to help them be their children's first and most important teachers;

working families have access to quality child care and educational choices; and

communities mobilize to encourage and support early learning.

This knowledge calls for new perspectives on how to provide *all* children, wherever they spend part or all of their days, with these basics. It means that we can't look at any one form of child care as better or worse than another, but rather as different.

And research tells us that quality matters in *all* types of child care. Regardless of the care setting, caregivers who are *intentional*—who want to care for children—and who have access to good quality information, resources and support are more likely to provide high quality, reliable care.

Understanding the differences, assets and challenges of various early childhood settings is essential to identifying the right strategies for enhancing the quality of each type of child care. This initiative aims to contribute to understanding and knowledge about how to improve family, friend and neighbor care, including how retailers and other employers can help.

Intentional Caregiving — A Key Characteristic of Quality[1]

FWI's research and subsequent studies indicate that child care providers who are *intentional* about their caregiving role are more likely to provide higher-quality, warmer and more attentive care—which is associated with better growth and development in children.

Intentional providers are those who, among other characteristics:

are committed to taking care of children and believe their work is important;

seek opportunities to learn about children's development;

think ahead about what the children are going to do and plan experiences for them; and

connect with other caregivers.

The body of research devoted to family, friend and neighbor care is growing. Many studies have given us important descriptive information—telling us who these caregivers are, why they provide care, how many parents use this type of arrangement, why they choose it, or how many states make subsidy payments to "license-exempt" caregivers. A few studies, including pioneering research by FWI, get beneath the surface, identifying the aspects of this care that most affect children's development.[2]

In 1998, the Bank Street College of Education created the Institute for a Child Care Continuum to enable researchers to study the impact of both policy and practice in family, friend and neighbor care.[3] A recent study in Washington provides a comprehensive picture of family, friend and neighbor care based on a statewide representative sample.[4]

And, since 2001, the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University has conducted research and compiled many of these studies into a variety of useful publications.

The conclusions outlined in this report are consistent with this growing base of empirical knowledge. Although not a statistically representative sample, we interviewed experts, employers, employees and their caregivers to add a new dimension to the discussion of family, friend and neighbor care. And they introduce a perspective rarely found in the other research—the view of employers. We hope that this report will contribute to a clearer understanding of how these issues affect employers and employees, and ways that employers can help with and benefit from community solutions.

Other Research on Family, Friend and Neighbor Care

Bank Street College of Education

The Institute for a Child Care Continuum at Bank Street College of Education serves as a clearinghouse for information on kith and kin child care programs and practice. It conducted some of the groundbreaking research on caregivers' interest and needs (*Neighborhood Child Care: Family, Friends and Neighbors Talk about Caring for Other People's Children*), as well as program practice (*Lessons Learned: Strategies for Working with Kith and Kin Caregivers*) that has influenced policy and program development for this population of caregivers. Its current focus is evaluation of initiatives to improve kith and kin child care. In addition to research, the Institute offers staff development services and technical assistance for programs that aim to serve kith and kin caregivers.

For more information see: www.bankstreet.edu.

Human Services Policy Center, Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington

Researchers at the University of Washington completed the first statewide, representative study of family, friend and neighbor care in February 2002. The study, *Understanding Family, Friend and Neighbor Care in Washington State: Developing Appropriate Training and Support*, found that nearly a half-million Washington children through age 12 spend time each week in family, friend and neighbor care and that about 295,000 adults provide this care, a quarter of them for more than 30 hours a week.

The researchers surveyed parents, caregivers, professionals, and policy makers to understand: how many children are in family, friend and neighbor care, for how many hours, and for what reasons; the characteristics, training, and motivations of family, friend and neighbor caregivers; and the views of policy makers and professionals regarding family, friend and neighbor care.

For more information see: www.hspc.org.

National Center for Children in Poverty

A recent publication from the National Center for Children in Poverty, *Kith and Kin—Informal Child Care: Highlights from Recent Research*, summarizes what available research tells about family, friend and neighbor care and identifies significant gaps in knowledge.

The many studies summarized in this comprehensive resource address:

demographic characteristics of providers, including education and experience, motivation, job commitment and regulatory issues;

experiences of children and parents, including global quality assessments, children's experiences, dimensions of care, opportunities for learning, social context of care, impact on work lives and parent and provider relationships; and

improving the quality of informal care.

For more information see: www.nccp.org.

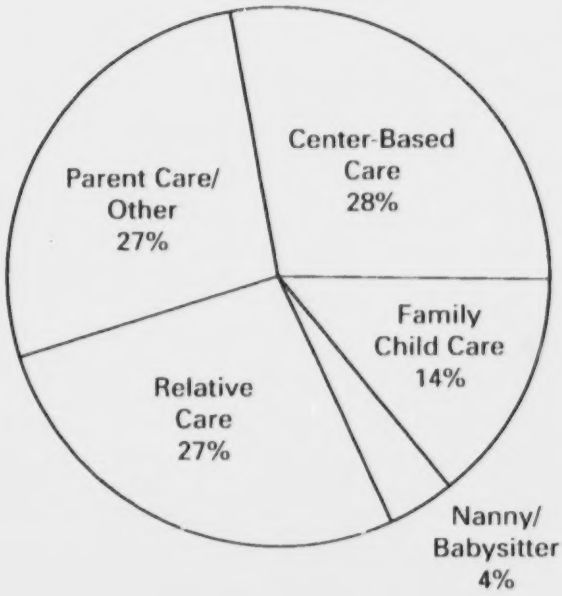
What Is Family, Friend and Neighbor Care?

The universe of family, friend and neighbor caregivers is vast, changing, and often invisible to the public. Some of the words describing this universe—*underground, illegal, informal,* or *license-exempt*—describe this care in terms of what it's not or use words that are not universally understood, suggesting that new language is needed.

For this report, we use the term *family, friend and neighbor care* to mean child care provided by parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives, friends and others in the neighborhood or

community. This care, also sometimes called *kith and kin* care, may be full-time, part-time, or a part of a patchwork of multiple care arrangements. Typically, family, friend and neighbor caregivers are exempt from state child care licensing requirements because they care for only a few children. Studies have found however, that some family, friend and neighbor care providers do not comply with state licensing rules because the number of children they care for regularly exceeds the limit allowed under the exemption.

How Many Children Are in Family, Friend and Neighbor Care?[5]



Nationally, research consistently shows that the majority of young children with parents in the workforce are not in licensed child care centers and family child care homes while their parents work. And, since many families use multiple child care arrangements, some children who spend part of their time in formal child care (centers or licensed family child care homes) also spend part of their time with family, friend and neighbor caregivers. In addition:

- infants and toddlers are more likely to be with relatives, while three-and-four-year-olds are more often found in center-based arrangements;[6]
- children from lower-income families are more likely to be in relative care arrangements, while children from higher-income families are more likely to be in center-based arrangements;[7] and
- higher-income families are more than twice as likely to be using regulated care than lower-income families (65 percent versus 26 percent), and are infrequent users of relative care.[8]

Why Family, Friend and Neighbor Care Matters

To children:

Many children are cared for by family, friends and neighbors every day. The quality of care and learning opportunities in these settings can significantly affect children's development and school readiness.

To parents:

Family, friend and neighbor care often offers the most flexible and affordable child care option for many employed parents.

When it works, children can be with someone the parents know and trust, who can reinforce the family's values, language and/or culture.

When it doesn't work, parents may worry about their children's well-being and may miss work more often.

To employers:

Enhancing the quality of family, friend and neighbor care can help increase the stability and dependability of care that many employees rely on.

When employees find dependable, quality child care, they may be absent less often, be more punctual and be better able to focus on their jobs.

Enhancing the quality of child care improves the likelihood that children will succeed in school and in life, potentially increasing the quality of the future workforce.

To policy makers:

The majority of children with parents in the workforce, including the majority of infants, toddlers and children in low-income families, are in family, friend and neighbor care.

Family, friends and neighbors comprise a large part of the child care workforce who should be included in efforts to provide training and to improve caregiver quality.

Since federal child care block grants and state funds pay for some of this kind of care, it is important to address quality as part of the public trust.

Enhancing the quality of family, friend and neighbor care can be an effective strategy for promoting school and life success and an investment in preventing future welfare dependency.

Enhancing the quality of family, friend and neighbor care can help employed parents keep working and is essential to achieving universal school readiness goals.

To funders:

There is a need for further research on strategies to meet the child care needs of employed parents.

Investing in community partnerships that assist family, friend and neighbor caregivers can help the large numbers of families who rely on this type of care.

Funders who support school readiness efforts may not achieve desired outcomes without improving the quality of family, friend and neighbor care.

About This Report

Between November 2001 and August 2002, FWI staff conducted interviews with national, state and local experts and innovative thinkers from a wide variety of disciplines related to early learning, health, family support, and community development. Those interviewed brought perspectives from research, policy, strategy, and program implementation. Each hour-long interview covered a series of questions intended to elicit new ideas and creative thinking about ways to assist family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

FWI staff also interviewed retail managers, retail employees with young children, and their family, friend and neighbor caregivers from participating companies in the NRF Retail Work Life Forum. These interviews focused on child care challenges, needs and experiences and were conducted in both English and Spanish.

The Time Has Come to Address Family, Friend and Neighbor Care

There is no doubt among the experts interviewed that there is a strong market need for family, friend and neighbor care. For many parents, this kind of care is a purposeful and positive choice that reflects a strong and often multi-generational commitment to the importance of the children in their families' lives. For others it is the only affordable option and/or the only option that offers the flexibility needed to work the hours required by their jobs.

Not only is family, friend and neighbor care a practical need, but a focus on this care also acknowledges the choices that are being made by working parents.

"Child care professionals need to respect the child care decisions made by low-income parents. They are often making the best possible choice given their resources and circumstances."

- Marta Rosa, Executive Director
Child Care Resource Center, Inc.

Until now, an *either/or* mindset has dominated policy debates. Some advocates and policy makers have focused only on licensed, center-based care as the key to quality, while others focused on family, friend and neighbor care as the key to parent choice. Now it is time to move beyond *either/or* to *both/and*.[9]

According to Richard Brandon, Director, Human Services Policy Center, University of Washington, family, friend and neighbor care typically offers much lower child-adult ratios than center-based or licensed family child care. Having a known and trusted caregiver, along with low ratios, is one of the major reasons parents select family, friend and neighbor care.

Years ago, the political climate was very different, observed Deborah Eaton, a founder of the National Family Child Care Association. "In the past, family, friend and neighbor caregivers may not have been welcomed into the provider community and offered opportunities for training and resources. Now the field is more open and accepting. Caregivers understand that we have to help *all* who are caring for children."

"It is not a matter of trading off family, friend and neighbor care in favor of professional care. We clearly must address the issues of both."

- Joan Lombardi, former Deputy Director
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau and
Founder and Director
Better Care for Babies Campaign

Welfare reform and the Child Care Development Block Grant have also significantly changed the child care policy landscape by allowing federal child care subsidies to pay for *license-exempt* care. With federal funds supporting this care, interest in helping caregivers prepare young children for school is increasing. Patty Siegel, Executive Director, California Child Care Resource and Referral Network said, "Welfare reform has dramatically increased the utilization of family, friend and neighborhood care and has made it crystal clear that we must intensify our focus and the energy we bring to the quality of care."

"Quality of care ultimately boils down to the quality of the relationship between the child care provider or teacher and the child."

- Neurons to Neighborhoods, 2000

How Do Parents View Quality?

When asked about quality, parents often describe the same characteristics, whether they are speaking about family, friend and neighbor care, licensed child care centers or licensed family child care homes.

Parents look for:

warmth and interest in their child;

richness of activities and environment;

skill of caregiver;

how the child feels—for example, if the child feels safe and secure;

low risk regarding health, safety, and adult-child ratios;

a caregiver who is accepting and supportive of the parent;

a caregiver who will talk to and share information with the parent;[10] and

availability of care for people working evenings and weekends.[11]

Family Friend and Neighbor Care is Different

The majority of family, friend and neighbor caregivers are relatives. And this type of care setting is a family home. This suggests that family support strategies may be a more effective framework for addressing quality than using professional early childhood quality improvement strategies.

"There is a vast difference between a family member caring for a child and a licensed provider," said Gwen Morgan, Founding Director, Center for Career Development in Early Care and Education, Wheelock College. "And the differences between family, friend and neighbor caregivers and other child care providers demand a totally different approach to providing support. The way we share information with family, friend and neighbor caregivers can be as important as the information itself."

Although some family, friend and neighbor caregivers want to pursue formal training and education, many say they're not interested in attending traditional training programs. Yet many caregivers say they *are* interested in opportunities to get together to learn with and from their peers about how to help the children they care for become better prepared for school. They want to know more about how children grow and change and how they can help children learn. They are also interested in health and safety and in learning about the community connections that can help them and their families. They want to learn in a social setting, a "get-together," rather than formal training.

Because of the nature of this kind of care and the reality that caregivers want to be connected with other caregivers in their neighborhoods, family support, rather than traditional child care training and technical assistance, offers a useful paradigm and language for approaching family, friend and neighbor care says Mon Cochran, Director, Early Childhood Program, Cornell University. "It is important to focus on networks and connecting people."

Yet when family, friend and neighbor caregivers are invited to meet and learn with others, some do pursue more formal education, such as the caregivers involved in the El Paso *Begin At Birth Health Promotores* or Alabama's *Kids and Kin Project*. In both of these initiatives, peer support and a chance to get together led providers to complete training at a community college (Texas) and earn a voluntary certification (Alabama). (See Model Initiatives, pages 26 and 27, for additional information on these projects.)

Larry Aber, Director, National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, believes that efforts to enhance the quality of family, friend and neighbor care should build on a combination of professional development, economic development and family support. He suggests that program designers and policy makers create specific strategies that help caregivers (1) become more skilled in promoting early learning and family support, and (2) understand and address the economic issues facing most caregivers that limit their capacity as early educators and family supporters.

Some community-based family support programs already offer support to family, friend and neighbor caregivers, according to Kathy Goetz-Wolf, Senior Group Vice President & Chief Operating Officer, Family Support America. Many have traditionally provided resource and referral services and find that adding activities to help family, friend and neighbor caregivers is a natural extension of their mission.

What We Learned: Interview Highlights

Headlines

Working families we interviewed are devoted to the well-being of their children and want the best possible care for them while they work.

Many parents intentionally choose family, friend, and neighbor care because it can connect their children to people they know and trust and who will support their family's values, language and/or culture.

Family, friend and neighbor care is the only option that offers the flexibility many employed parents need to meet their job responsibilities, especially for parents who work non-traditional hours.

Most family, friend and neighbor caregivers we interviewed want to do their best, but often feel isolated and lack easy access to information about child development and early learning, peer connections, and educational materials.

Many—although certainly not enough—excellent resources to support family, friend and neighbor caregivers already exist in communities, but are not well-coordinated, known or accessible to working families, caregivers or employers.

Retail managers we interviewed appreciate the child care challenges their employees face and want to help, but do not know how to do so or how to connect with community resources.

There are community-based strategies that retailers and other employers can use to support and enhance family, friend, and neighbor care.

What We Learned from Employers, Employees and Their Caregivers

We interviewed managers, employee parents and caregivers from member companies of the NRF Retail Work Life Forum. Interviews were conducted in five communities: Wallingford, CT; San Antonio, TX; Dallas, TX; Atlanta, GA; and Boston, MA. The majority of caregivers interviewed were relatives.

Although specific experiences varied widely, the interviews reflected many common issues and challenges. The experiences and attitudes we heard were also closely aligned with findings from other research about child care needs of working parents in a wide variety of industries and work settings.

What Managers Said:

The need to staff call centers, distribution centers and other 24-hour operations creates child care challenges for employees that often result in missed time on the job. In fact, although child care is one of the greatest challenges managers face, it is the challenge they feel least equipped to address.

"As a parent, my biggest fear is not knowing who is taking care of my children. I refused a management opportunity in another city because I didn't know anyone there who could take care of my kids."

- Manager

They try to offer as much flexibility and support as they can to employees struggling with child care breakdowns that occur when a child is sick or a caregiver is unavailable. The fragility of child care arrangements and the challenges of juggling work and family life are well understood by managers—some managers experience the same challenges themselves. They want to offer flexibility, but the work demands of many retail jobs makes it difficult to arrange.

They know that providing child care assistance can help recruit and retain employees and potentially increase productivity. Managers would like to provide more assistance, but aren't sure what they can do. Since providing on-site care is rarely financially feasible and may not be the right strategy to meet employees' needs, they would like to know other ways to make care more accessible, of higher quality, and more affordable.

"How can you focus 100 percent on the job when you are worried about your child?"

- Manager

Few managers know how to access existing community resources or how to partner with other organizations or employers although cultivating partnerships with other organizations in their communities could help address child care needs. Many managers would like to work with potential community partners who could bring solutions to the table.

They don't know how to access or provide available, high quality information to employees on topics such as parenting, how to choose and access child care, or how to obtain child health insurance. Yet they would like to share such information with employees and their customers through public relations and advertising.

They would like to use their companies' resources in new ways to support employees and their caregivers, such as using retail space for community meetings and events, disseminating information, and offering products and discounts that could help children and their caregivers and bring customers to their stores at the same time.

"If I can get good information into the employees' hands...that has to be helpful."

- Manager

"When child care falls through for employees or kids become sick and the employee is unable to work, this has a negative impact on productivity, customer service and morale. We have a lot of single parents who don't have back-up child care. We try to be lenient and flexible with work schedules but it is not always possible."
- Manager

What Employees/Parents Said:

They are turning their lives inside out to arrange care for their children. Employees described using many strategies including multiple caregivers, difficult commutes, shift changes, and even moves to enable trusted family members to care for their children.

They need the flexibility that family, friend and neighbor care offers to meet their job responsibilities. Employees who work non-typical hours and days are unable to use child care centers and family child care homes that only operate during standard business hours.

When a trusted family, friend or neighbor caregiver wants to and can care for their child it helps the entire family. Families often see this kind of care as the best possible situation for young children, although many would like their children to attend a preschool or child care center when they reach age three.

"My girls feel safe and secure; there is no fear of the unknown."
- Parent/employee

They can have a sense of security and peace of mind about their child's safety and well-being when using a trusted family, friend or neighbor. Many view their care situation as a way of "building family relationships" and ensuring that their child is exposed to values consistent with their own.

Using family, friend and neighbor care can also be challenging. It can be difficult to talk with family members or neighbors about sensitive child rearing issues like discipline. And families rarely have other options when caregivers are ill or otherwise unavailable.

Caring for a child can be demanding and frustrating. Parents are concerned about the stress of caregiving, especially on grandparents, and recognize their caregivers' need for occasional respite.

"After nine years of working nights, I switched to day shifts—at my wife's request. Child care is now split among my sister-in-law, my wife and me. We all work and take care of each other's kids."
- Parent/employee

"It's very comforting to know that my daughter is with her grandma. She can teach her Spanish."

- Parent/employee

Parents would like their children to have more learning opportunities and expressed concern over a lack of books, toys, games and other educational materials. They would like to help their caregivers make connections in their communities to access these resources.

What Caregivers Said:

Many feel great love for and commitment to the children in their care, along with a sense of responsibility to support the working parents. They feel they are making an important contribution to the entire family and take their responsibilities very seriously. But they are caregivers only for these children and don't aspire to becoming professional child care providers.

"Caring for my niece and nephew means that I know them better."

- Caregiver

Caregivers, especially grandparents, are proud of being able to pass along what they learned from raising their own children. Yet some also know that a lot has changed since they raised their children and want to learn about current health, safety and child development information.

Disagreements with parents about child-rearing can be challenging. Caregivers would like information and the chance to talk with peers about some of these challenges.

They often feel isolated. They would like more opportunities to interact with other caregivers and to give the children they care for opportunities to interact with other children.

They would love occasional breaks from the mental, emotional and physical demands of their work and often need time to take care of personal business. Some said that they would like to get to know and trust other caregivers in their neighborhoods so that they could eventually give each other breaks.

They would like to learn more about child development, health and safety and other topics but are not necessarily interested in formal training or education. Although some like going to classes and are inspired to continue their education, many would rather learn with and from their peers in informal settings and/or get tips and ideas from television, radio, the newspaper or in their neighborhood.

"Sometimes I would like to get out and interact with other people."

- Caregiver/parent looking after four children

They would like easy access to books and learning materials, along with ideas on everyday activities for children and information about community resources and events for children and families.

"I've taken care of them on and off since they were babies...I'll continue to take care of them until they no longer need me."

- Grandmother caring for her granddaughter and grandson

National, State and Local Experts

From the 55 experts we interviewed (a list is included in the appendix), we gathered a wide variety of perspectives and creative suggestions for how communities can help family, friend and neighbor caregivers. Several key themes echoed what we heard from retail managers, parents/employees and caregivers.

Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers Can Have Unique Strengths

Close Relationships

Again and again, experts stressed that perhaps the most positive characteristic of family, friend and neighbor care situations can be the strength of the loving bond between children and their caregivers. Parents can gain peace of mind from leaving their children with someone they know and trust, who really wants to provide the care, and who is sensitive and responsive to the children's needs.

"We shouldn't try to turn family, friend and neighbor caregivers into professionals. They are family—that is their strength. We should help them be good family members who know how to promote positive child development."

- Joan Lombardi, former Deputy Director,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Child Care Bureau, and Founder and Director,
Better Care for Babies Campaign

Experts also underscored the need to recognize the differences between family, friend and neighbor caregivers, license-exempt providers and licensed providers. Most family, friend and neighbor caregivers do not see themselves as professionals and have no desire to become professional. They see themselves as supportive family members and friends.

Family, friend and neighbor caregivers can reinforce the values and cultural consistency families desire. In Seattle, Washington, the Human Services Department created task forces to study culturally relevant child care. The task forces focus on several communities: African-American, Latino, Asian-Pacific Islander, the homeless, Native American and Gay/Lesbian/ Bisexual/Transgender. In every one of these communities, families had two consistent desires: culturally relevant child care and helping kids become ready for school. Needs assessments conducted by the culturally relevant task forces found that families often used family, friend and neighbor care because of the opportunity to reinforce family values, culture and language.

Flexibility and Affordability

The best family, friend and neighbor caregivers are motivated by their desire to help the employed parents and their family in general, as well as by their love for the children they care for. They often provide more flexible care on schedules not available in formal child care settings. Shift workers, night workers and workers whose schedules change frequently often have no choice but family, friend and neighbor care.

Since family members rarely charge more than a nominal fee for providing child care, low-wage earning families are often better able to survive economically using this kind of care. For some, using family, friend and neighbor care allows them to improve their prospects for the future, such as saving to buy a permanent home.

Flexibility Is a Central Issue

Work, family and caregiver flexibility all play a role in a parent's reported quality of child care. Parents report the highest quality of care when they have a flexible family, a flexible caregiver, and a flexible employer. Those who are least satisfied with the quality of their care also consistently report low flexibility at home, at work and with their caregiver.[12]

The Unique Challenges of Family, Friend and Neighbor Care

Assuring Quality

Family, friend and neighbor caregivers are not professionals and may lack adequate or current knowledge of early childhood development. Their homes may not have appropriate safety equipment and they may not know what to do in medical emergencies. They may also not know how to keep a young child busy with appropriate activities all day or how to encourage language development. They may not have access to a variety of books and educational materials. Designing ways to address these challenges is essential to helping *all* children be ready to succeed in school.

Billie Young, Manager, Child Development Programs, Human Services Department, City of Seattle, Washington, summarizes the challenge for regulators and policy makers this way: "We know families want and need family, friend and neighbor care. How do we respond to their needs and still meet our concerns about children's growth, development and safety?"

The high numbers of family, friend and neighbor caregivers also creates challenges for state child care program administrators. Each state sets its own rules for license-exempt providers, typically family, friend and neighbor caregivers, who can receive federal and state funds. "In Illinois there are approximately 40,000 license-exempt child care providers caring for approximately 93,000 children. Providing services for a population of caregivers and children this size is extremely challenging; however, strategies, such as mobile resource vans, are currently in place in Illinois that are beginning to help family, friend and neighbor caregivers," said Holly Knicker, Program Manager, Illinois Department of Human Services.

"We often fail to acknowledge the experience of family, friend and neighbor caregivers and to be respectful. On the other hand we need to recognize that experience isn't always all that is needed."

- Deborah Eaton, Founder
National Family Child Care Association

Michigan also has a high percentage of children in unlicensed care—almost 70 percent. According to Paul Nelson, Director (retired), Child Development and Care Division, Michigan Family Independence Agency, "No one knows about the quality of that care." Michigan asks unlicensed providers applying for subsidies to sign a form certifying some minimum expectations around age, ability to read and write and handle emergencies. The state also does background checks for abuse and neglect and criminal activity. "We are eager for guidance on how and what we can do to improve quality for this universe," he adds.

Richard Brandon, Director, Human Services Policy Center, University of Washington recently completed a study of family, friend and neighbor caregivers in the state of Washington. The study found that one-third of people receiving (federal) government subsidies are using family, friend and neighbor caregivers. "Since the government is already involved in the financial support of this form of care," Brandon said, "it is really not crossing a big line to support improving its quality."

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Professor of Early Childhood and Family Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University, noted that the nation needs to find ways to support those who are providing this type of care. "While regulations and formal training may not be appropriate, certainly the provision of supports that enable caregivers to voluntarily meet together to share experiences, and to learn from one another, should be considered. The formation of networks, the provision of timely information, and the knowledge that a caring society supports this work is essential."

"We may need to re-think our current definitions of child care quality in the context of family, friend and neighbor caregivers. I'm caring for my granddaughter every Friday and have learned from personal experience that this is very different from regulated care. Now I'm rethinking everything I assumed about how to support caregivers and define quality. It's a lot more like supporting families."

- Kathy Modigliani, Director, Family Child Care Project, Arlington, Massachusetts

Close Relationships

Some of the very qualities that characterize the strength of family, friend and neighbor care can also create the biggest challenges. The potentially close relationship between parents and caregivers can create tension. It can be hard for parents to be candid with caregivers when they disagree about sensitive child rearing issues, especially when the caregiver is a grandparent, other relative, or close friend. Parents, grateful for the caregivers' support, may not want to appear demanding and directive about how the child should be treated. Or, if the parents have no other child care options, they may be reluctant to "rock the boat" or jeopardize their current arrangement by making requests or giving directions.

Isolation

Almost all of the experts who work with family, friend and neighbor caregivers spoke about the isolation of caregivers and the need to find new ways to reach out and connect them with resources and with each other. Interviews with caregivers and other studies underscore this need.

Transportation

Since transportation is frequently a challenge for families and for caregivers, programs that are located in or that bring resources to their neighborhoods are often most effective. Neighborhood-based programs and services can also inspire trust and familiarity.

Housing

In both urban and rural communities, housing is crucial as well. Many children are cared for in homes that are not safe or in adequate condition. Caregivers often need help with safety equipment and basic home repairs.

Special Challenges and Time Off

Donna Butts, Executive Director, Generations United in Washington, DC, notes that providing quality child care can be a challenge for grandparents. "Many are well aware that it has been a long time since they were parents. They are not sure where to get accurate information about education, substance abuse, or changes in medical care." Grandparents also often get tired caring for young children and frequently need a break and some time to themselves.

Finally, many experts concurred that all caregivers need a respite from care—not just grandparents.

Promising Strategies

Almost every expert with experience reaching out to family, friend and neighbor caregivers has good news to report: most caregivers and parents want to learn more about how to help children learn and prepare for school and life success. According to América Bracho, Executive Director of Latino Health Access in Santa Ana, California, "The key is helping them in ways that work and inspire trust. And that may mean working through non-traditional organizations in the community."

And experts agreed that sharing information, connecting caregivers and creating community connections are essential to improving the quality of family, friend and neighbor care. Experts suggested the following strategies to operationalize these activities.

Sharing Information

Provide basic child development information. June Smith, Executive Director, Region A Partnership for Children in North Carolina, describes how her organization supports community early learning groups that start with one committed parent or caregiver who recruits other interested families in the neighborhood to meet regularly and learn about child development topics together.

Provide high quality resources. If the goal is, as Joan Lombardi, Director, Better Baby Care Campaign, says, "to help family, friend and neighbor caregivers become family members who know how to promote positive learning," the quality of the information, learning opportunities, connections and supports that are made available to caregivers is critical. Resources should be accurate, research-based and come from credible sources or organizations.

Take into account how adults learn. We know how adults learn best: with others, and when they are presented with new information that is relevant, useful, interesting and helps them solve current problems. It is important to meet individuals where they are in terms of their knowledge and experience.

Keep materials simple. Tip sheets, newsletters, and other materials are most effective. Caregivers are most likely to use something colorful and simple that they can keep by the phone or on the refrigerator.

Know whom you want to reach. Bibi Lobo, Vice President, National Latino Children's Institute, said, "To reach Latinos, don't use the traditional methods. For example, flyers don't work. It is important to have a personal connection with the person who is inviting you to do something. Get your information out to parents and caregivers at the local bodega (grocery store), laundromat or beauty salon."

Take literacy into account. In some families, low literacy may be a major challenge for parents and caregivers. In these cases, written materials may not be the best way to provide support. Depending on your audience, discussion groups, coffee klatches, videos, radio messages or television programs may be the most effective vehicles for sharing information and facilitating learning.

Be creative. Reaching caregivers often requires creative marketing efforts. Staff at Parents as Teachers (PAT), a national in-home program to help parents learn parenting skills and understand child growth and development, use word of mouth, take advantage of free late night ad space on public television, and distribute flyers in obstetricians' offices to invite caregiver participation in PAT activities.

Partner with public and commercial television. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS), as well as local commercial television and cable stations can be vital partners in developing and sharing resources for caregivers. PBS created a national project, called *Ready To Learn*, to help parents and caregivers use television to help children learn. Nearly 150 public television stations sponsor *Ready To Learn* projects around the country. Their activities go beyond television programming and include other community education and literacy activities. For example, in Dallas, Texas, KERA-TV Public Television partners with Verizon on a *First Book* campaign to encour-

age young children to read. And Oklahoma City's CBS affiliate is partnering with Oklahomans for School Readiness on an early literacy campaign. Community access cable programs also offer opportunities to reach caregivers.

Connecting Caregivers

Begin with support, not training. Richard Brandon, Director, Human Services Policy Center, University of Washington State, recently completed a study of family, friend and neighbor caregivers in the state of Washington. He found that many caregivers are looking for support, not training. This doesn't mean they don't want learning opportunities. While some may go on to get more formal education, many simply want to know how they can do their best.

Create a process for intentional learning. In its 1994 research, *The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care*, Families and Work Institute learned that when caregivers come together initially, they look for support and for quick answers to pressing problems. Over time, many begin to see that support and learning are part of the same continuum and they want to continue to learn more. Like children, adults learn best when social, emotional and intellectual learning go together.

Facilitate peer groups and watch your language. Peer groups are a very effective way to both share essential child development, early learning, health and safety and other information and address the isolation that so many caregivers face at the same time. Peer groups work particularly well with grandparents, according to Donna Butts, Executive Director, Generations United. She adds, "It is also important to watch what you call gatherings designed to attract grandparents. Don't use the term *support group*—call it a coffee club and build in a social aspect. Grandparents are looking to connect with others who face similar challenges."

Create the right environment for connecting caregivers. When you work with caregivers and families, relationships are very important, according to Sally Hansen, Early Childhood Coordinator, Des Moines, Iowa Public Schools and consultant to Hawaii Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA). GBA created Play and Learn Community Centers, neighborhood gathering places where caregivers can get together and bring the children they care for. They also learn about child development and participate in informal leadership development activities. "When we train group leaders we make sure the environment is very relaxed," Hansen said. "There are no desks so it doesn't seem like school. A lot of people we work with don't have the best memories of school."

Go where people naturally congregate. Support, information sharing and connections that happen in neighborhood places, such as places of worship, community centers, supermarkets, malls, laundromats, beauty salons, parks, health centers—wherever people gather with their friends and neighbors—have a much greater chance of success. Not only are they more convenient to get to, but they are often places where caregivers already feel comfortable.

Recognize caregivers' contributions. Incentives and publicity are often effective ways to recognize caregivers for their efforts. Small stipends and gift certificates are often greatly appreciated. Formal recognition is often in itself an incentive. "Caregivers in our program were thrilled to

participate in graduation ceremonies. For many, the diploma we gave them was their first," said Sally Hansen, Early Childhood Coordinator, Des Moines, Iowa Public Schools and consultant to Hawaii Good Beginnings Alliance. "In fact, the graduation was more appreciated than any present."

Help caregivers and parents find their voice. Caregivers can play a special role in advocacy, according to Jack Levine, President, Voices for Florida's Children. They can join with parents to help focus attention on the public policies that affect large numbers of children. "With help, people can talk eloquently about their needs when they are empowered to do so. There is a strong story in people of all ages coming together to help care for children."

Creating Community Connections

Create a new breed of community educators. Diantha Schull, President, Libraries for the Future, envisions a future where community organizations create "intentional connections" across sectors so that families and children cannot fall through the cracks. "We need a coalition-oriented strategy, where a variety of community institutions such as schools, libraries, churches, health organizations and others, work together over time, sharing resources, understanding one another and actually talking about their common clients or users." Such an approach, she believes, could create a new kind of *community educator* who can work in a number of environments—someone who is not a health provider, not a teacher, not a librarian, but who can teach everyone working with children how to support growth, development and learning.

Establish networks and trusting relationships within the community. Jeri Robinson, Vice President of Early Childhood Education at The Children's Museum of Boston, said, "This can be a slow process that requires a long-term commitment from people and their organizations. It takes two to three years of work to develop a good relationship with a community. You have to be willing to hang in when it's good *and* when it's tough to be a true partner. You must also know how to really listen to others in the community."

Help health care organizations join other community organizations as conveners. Connecting with the many organizations providing health care services to families and children is essential, but navigating the complex array of providers can be challenging. Local health departments, which often support health and safety in child care and can have direct connections with local programs like Head Start, could provide entrée to other services and supports. "Increasingly, public health agencies are becoming the convener of the diverse health-related organizations and interests in their communities," said Magda Peck, CEO of CityMatCH and Professor of Pediatrics and Public Health at the University of Nebraska. "Beyond direct health services like immunization, they can support community collaborations and partnerships that help caregivers and children."

Make libraries and museums a strong resource for families and caregivers. In many communities, libraries have developed a community-centered and family-centered focus. They can become a strong resource for young children, their families and caregivers. Museums also have become conveners in many communities. Lou Casagrande, Executive Director, The Children's

Museum of Boston, sees "an overall movement among children's museums to become the multicultural town squares in support of parents."

Think creatively about community resources. Looking at community connections can yield resources from all sorts of unexpected sources, according to Jack Levine, President, Voices for Florida's Children. "We could create volunteer and resource banks. Community volunteers could list their talents—computer help or carpentry for example—and caregivers could access the assistance. The same could work for other resources. For example, a piano might sit unused for years in a retired couple's home. A child could play that piano if it is made available. There are books on many shelves that are not being read—we need to match them up with children who have no books. And malls, retail stores, community centers, volunteer centers, employers, United Ways, colleges and universities, faith communities and many others could host, organize and/or publicize these kinds of resource sharing banks."

Model Initiatives

The experts interviewed shared their experiences in creating and learning to use a wide range of program models. Although these initiatives are presented in three categories—information sharing, caregiver connections and community connections—they all focus on improving the quality of child care provided by family, friend and neighbor caregivers. This list is by no means exhaustive, but these examples illustrate some of the creative ways that community organizations and public and private partnerships are beginning to address the needs of family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

Information Sharing

Children in My Care

In partnership with the New York Office of Children and Family Services, Cornell University's Cooperative Extension created 12 newsletters for family, friend, and neighbor caregivers. These educational materials help parents making a transition from welfare to work. They focus on a variety of topics including parent-provider communication, what we know about infants and toddlers, positive discipline, helping children learn to love reading, keeping children safe and healthy and caring for relatives. (When am I the grandma and when am I the child care provider?) The newsletters are filled with simple facts, practical information (such as how to make toys from soda bottles), and fun learning activities for children.

For more information contact: www.human.cornell.edu/hd/cecp/caregiver.html.

Better Care for Babies

Joan Lombardi, Founder and Director, Better Care for Babies Campaign, Washington, DC, used a 1998 government grant to create an initiative to improve the quality of child care for infants and toddlers. She developed 12 steps for communities to address quality care for infants and toddlers in the categories of healthy care, family care, development care and critical investments. The Better Care for Babies Web site provides up-to-date information on what is new in infant and toddler care.

For more information contact: www.betterbabycare.org.

Words for the Future

The National Latino Children's Institute created an early childhood public education toolkit to help community leaders reach out to the Latino population on child development issues. The kit includes information on early brain development and provides tools to help organizations such as churches, child care centers, health clinics and schools. Culturally and linguistically appropriate, the

materials are carefully created to reach Latino families. They include, for example, "Consejos de mi tía—Advice from my Auntie."

For more information contact: www.nlci.org.

Ready To Learn

Ready To Learn is a Public Broadcasting System program focused on helping all children begin school ready to learn. PBS and its member stations help achieve school readiness in a number of ways including offering high-quality children's television programming based on specific educational goals with interactive online resources for kids and their caregivers, producing on-air educational messages that teach kids important skills, presenting community outreach and educational materials and offering TV tips for parents and caregivers.

For more information contact: www.pbskids.org/readytolearn.

Caregiver Connections

National Family Support Mapping Project

Family Support America is mapping and collecting information on every family support program in the country. This information will result in a national database with information on family support programs around the country. Data on budget, size, population served, services offered and resources provided are being collected at both the state and regional level.

For more information contact: www.familysupportamerica.org.

Parents as Teachers National Center—Supporting Care Providers through Personal Visits

Parents as Teachers National Center has a personal visit curriculum available to those who mentor, educate, and support care providers in their communities. The curriculum contains topical personal visit lesson plans such as Safety, Environments, and Emerging Literacy. The curriculum contains handouts for care providers and parents as well as resources for the provider educator.

For more information contact: www.patnc.org.

Head Start At-Home Partners Project

The Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, MA partnered with Head Start to work with 25 families using in-home relative care. The families became Head Start families and the services were provided to the caregiver in the family's home. Services include health and dental screenings, activi-

ties, and field trips with other caregivers. The project also helped connect the providers to community resources. The Child Care Resource Center also created a home video, *When a Relative, Friend or Neighbor Takes Care of Your Child*, which is used to provide one-on-one technical assistance to parents and caregivers.

For more information contact: www.ccrcinc.org.

Kids and Kin

After conducting focus groups with relative providers throughout rural Alabama, Voices for Alabama's Children responded by launching Kids and Kin, which offers training, education, a monthly provider newsletter and events to relative care providers. Participating providers have organized caregiver appreciation luncheons, requested and completed training on child safety and child development and several are currently working toward a voluntary certification for relative care providers.

For more information contact: www.alavoices.org.

Training Wheels Vans

In Memphis, Tennessee, the public library visits neighborhoods in a van loaded with books to lend and give away, and provides learning materials, games and other resources for teen parents and grandparents who care for young children. Operating with a librarian and early childhood educator on board, this library on wheels initiative is part of the national program *Born to Read* and functions as a mobile classroom. It has become a vital part of many neighborhoods.

For more information contact: www.memphislibrary.org/childrenstrawhe.htm.

Quality Counts Vans

Illinois uses some of its federal child care quality funds to support Quality Counts Vans. The vans were purchased for child care resource and referral agencies (R&Rs) and participating R&Rs also received funding for staff. These vans go to neighborhoods as a resource for caregivers and young children. Required to serve at least 25 percent family, friend and neighbor caregivers, these vans bring lending libraries, toys and supplies, consumer education and health and safety information to neighborhoods on a regular basis.

For more information contact: www.state.il.us/agency/dhs/ricc2001.pdf.

San Francisco Bay Area Association of Mothers Clubs

There are 44 Moms Clubs in the San Francisco Bay Area, including one called *Moms, Dads and Munchkins*. Their primary mission is to "nurture the nurturer" or provide support for mom and

dad caregivers. Most offer: meetings, newsletters, babysitting co-ops, "in-a-pinch" care, playgroups, community outreach, opportunities for socializing, and activities that focus on hobbies and personal interests.

For more information contact: www.geocities.com/sfbamc/.

Arizona Kith and Kin Project

The Arizona Kith and Kin Project provides support to family, friend and neighbor caregivers through support and training groups. The groups meet weekly for 14 weeks to discuss topics such as guidance and discipline, daily schedule planning, nutrition, parent/caregiver relationships, business practices, health and safety, language, and literacy. To eliminate barriers to attendance, the project provides free on-site child care and transportation to and from the meetings. Launched as a pilot in 1999 in three sites, the project expanded to nine sites in 2002.

For more information contact: www.arizonachildcare.org.

Community Connections

Begin at Birth Health Promotores

Along the rural US-Mexico border, neighborhood health promoters (promotores) help working families address critical public health needs. These families live in unregulated rural subdivisions (colonias) that often lack roads, running water and electricity. Begin at Birth, an El Paso, Texas early childhood development initiative, partnered with these promoters to recruit and provide training to the many family, friend and neighbor caregivers in the rural neighborhoods (colonias). In 2001, promoters recruited 126 caregivers who each completed a 45-hour entry-level child development course developed by New Mexico State University and delivered in Spanish. Many participating caregivers are now getting GEDs and seeking further education. Initiative leaders hope to be able to meet increasing demand for more courses in more neighborhoods.

For more information contact: www.pdnhf.org.

Leveling the Sandbox and Count Down to Kindergarten

When the Children's Museum of Boston decided to make a citywide impact on early childhood, they created a program called Leveling the Sandbox. The museum partnered with Head Start, kindergarten and child care teachers around the city to realize its goal of working as a convener, networker and connector. As a result the program now touches 10,000 – 15,000 families. Participants include bilingual child care providers who speak English and Spanish, Greek, Russian or Chinese. The course includes a half-day seminar, three field trips to the museum with children

and three family nights at the museum (for the caregivers, the children they care for and the children's families). All caregivers are invited, regardless of their regulatory status. Caregivers and families receive free museum memberships, orientation to the museum and are asked to help shape the content of the learning sessions. The Children's Museum is currently involving 96 families in this initiative and is partnering with Head Start, child care resource and referral organizations, churches and other community groups to recruit caregivers.

For more information contact: www.bostonkids.org/news.

Play and Learn Community Centers

Responding to a need for neighborhood gathering places and ways for families to connect with each other, Hawaii's Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) facilitated development of Play and Learn Centers throughout the state. These volunteer-led neighborhood gathering places offer a place for area caregivers to get together with the children they care for, learn about child development, and participate in informal leadership development activities. GBA-sponsored vans with early childhood learning materials and centers provide supplies to area families. Many neighborhood participants have been inspired to greater civic involvement and are seeking further education after getting involved in one of the centers.

For more information contact: www.goodbeginnings.org.

Ashe County Partnership for Children Family Support and Cooperative Play Center

The Ashe County Partnership for Children is a non-profit organization led by local volunteers. It provides programs and services for families and children in Ashe County, North Carolina. The Family Support Center, staffed by a coordinator, early childhood caregivers and therapists, has a strong focus on literacy. Many participants in the family literacy program are grandparents caring for their teenage daughter's child. The Partnership also supports a Cooperative Play Center, open to everyone in the community, that helps reduce the isolation common to caregivers. In an effort to foster networks and relationships, some times are slotted for grandparents, some slotted for parents, some for other caregivers. The co-op room has a wide variety of resources including a kitchen, science center, playroom, infant center, and music room.

For more information contact: www.sel-mor.com/acpc.

The Family Place

The Family Place project is a growing network of more than 100 libraries across the country offering parents and caregivers a welcoming and supportive environment that promotes healthy child development, family literacy, and access to community services. By working with schools, clinics and other community agencies, libraries serve as anchors in their communities and as centers for lifelong learning. Hallmarks of The Family Place are:

a coalition of local leaders and related professionals who steer families to the library, advise the library on programming, and advocate for the library in other arenas;

parent/child workshops—a five-week program for kids ages 1-3 and their caregivers that features toys, books and art supplies for kids, as well as professionals from community agencies who can answer caregivers' questions about their children;

outreach to families and caregivers; and

a multimedia early-childhood collection that includes books, videos, toys and computers.

For more information contact: www.lff.org.

Project Lift-Off

The City of Seattle, in partnership with 40 community leaders, created Project Lift-Off to support effective and affordable early learning and out-of-school opportunities for all Seattle and King County children and youth. Through a partnership with corporate and private funders, the city contributed $375,000 in matching dollars to create an opportunity fund for strategic investments in early care and education and out-of-school time. Six opportunity fund grants were awarded to community-based agencies for projects supporting family, friend and neighbor care. The opportunity fund investments are designed with four goals in mind: to provide support and quality improvement for family, friend and neighbor caregivers; to build community knowledge about caregivers and their needs; to develop toolkits for those working with caregivers to increase the effectiveness of a growing support network; and to identify needed systemic changes to provide the support that family, friend and neighbor caregivers need. Grantee agencies have developed support groups, training and skill building workshops, and toolkits to support over 150 family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

For more information contact: www.cityofseattle.net/humanservices/fys/projectliftoff/.

What Communities, Retailers, Policy Makers and Funders Can Do: More Expert Advice

What Communities Can Do

Start at the Very Beginning of a Child's Life

Send all new parents home from the hospital with information on early childhood development, practical information on available community resources (including child care), how to use them, and telephone numbers to call if they need help or connections.

Build on Quality Early Childhood Programs Already in Place to Support Child Care Providers

Extend and adapt current programs offered by resource and referral agencies, family child care associations, family support programs and multi-service groups such as YWCA's and YMCA's, settlement houses, maternal and child health providers, and cultural institutions such as libraries and museums to serve family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

Forge Relationships with Employers

Convene, support and work in public-private partnerships to enlist broad support for helping family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

Help employers understand the community resources available to them.

Help employers address the workplace issues they face as a result of the difficulties employees face in finding high quality, reliable child care.

Recognize and reward employers who contribute to community solutions.

Expand or Create Collaborations, Alliances and Partnerships

Identify places where parents and caregivers naturally congregate such as schools, malls, stores, doctors' offices, health clinics, faith communities, and neighborhood centers to share information and connect them with other community resources such as libraries, senior centers or museums.

Help established community organizations pool resources, materials, and knowledge of what families need and how to reach parents and providers. They can build on this shared knowledge to create new models of parent and family support.

Create partnerships that facilitate cohesion, communication and coordination among services and institutions that may not yet be connected.

Create New Services and Supports to Help Parents and Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers

Help eliminate isolation by providing places where caregivers can visit with other caregivers, along with play equipment and activities so that children can play and learn while the caregivers visit and learn.

Provide drop-in or respite care for children so caregivers can have some time for themselves.

Provide transportation for caregivers and children to activities and learning opportunities that exist in their community.

Bring early literacy programs, materials, and other quality resources to neighborhoods.

Help parents connect with each other and with other supports.

Create special programs and resources for fathers, grandfathers, uncles and other men who care for children.

Help Museums, Libraries, and Other Cultural Institutions Expand Their Roles in the Community

Help museums and libraries serve not only as centers of culture and education, but also as community conveners, connectors and gathering places.

Provide resource rooms and activities for children while offering their caregivers information and support.

Extend the reach of librarians and museum professionals by helping them leave their facilities and take their programs into the community.

Provide free admission, special performances and other learning opportunities from arts organizations to caregivers and children.

Help Parks and Recreation Facilities Expand Their Roles

Work to create neighborhood parks if none exist.

Help existing parks and recreation facilities host events for caregivers, parents and children, such as organized games, discussion groups, story hours or drop-in or respite care programs.

Involve Seniors

- Work with senior centers and programs to help grandparents who care for their grandchildren.
- Provide accurate information about early childhood development to seniors.
- Help seniors who care for young children share their perspectives with the public and policy makers.

Involve Youth

- Invite youth to read to children at community story hours, collect books for providers or volunteer to spend time with children.
- Help youth participate in efforts to improve early childhood environments such as repairing or making toys, delivering and installing smoke alarms or building and/or painting fences or outdoor play equipment.
- Engage youth to advocate for a better early learning system.

Help Health Care Providers Share Information

- Use immunizations, well-baby visits and other health care interactions to provide information and support to parents and caregivers.

What Retailers and Other Businesses Can Do

Help Employees

- Provide information about early childhood development, early learning, child care options and community resources to employees who are parents and/or caregivers.
- Create times and places for employee/parent support, learning or discussion groups.
- Share information with employees on how to support their family, friend and neighbor caregivers.
- Look for win/win solutions for the employee and the employer in providing flexibility and when providing leave to take care of sick children or to take kids to medical appointments.

Participate in Community Partnerships

- Participate in and contribute to community partnerships to enhance family, friend and neighbor care.
- Become a champion for children's issues in the community.
- Use company facilities, advertising and activities to support community-based initiatives that help family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

- Partner with others to obtain quality child development, early learning, health, parenting and literacy information and materials to share with employees/parents and the public.
- Use this information in company advertising.

Position Retail Locations and Malls as Sources of Community Information

- Make local stores and shopping centers the hub of community information by posting calendars of events, information on programs, services and resources for caregivers with employees and customers.
- Set up computer information kiosks in stores and malls where information on parenting and care giving can be accessed and printed out, parents can share their opinions on policy issues that affect them, and resources can be banked or exchanged.

Develop Creative Uses for Space at Stores and Facilities

- Provide community meeting space to organizations helping children and families.
- Create community resource rooms where books, toys and educational materials are available.
- Partner with credible community groups to sponsor playgroups with planned activities for neighborhood children and caregivers.
- Sponsor events that demonstrate learning activities.
- Host library story hours and book clubs.
- Serve as the community "park bench" where caregivers can come to meet with others who are caring for children.
- Hold immunization clinics and other child health programs in stores or malls.
- Sponsor family fun nights and invite families to bring caregivers along.
- Provide on-site child care for an afternoon to offer respite to parents and caregivers.
- Bring museum activities and mini-exhibits on-site to stores.

Create and Distribute Quality Information and Materials

- Distribute learning kits for parents and caregivers and partner with credible community groups on content.
- Partner with community groups to create and publicize information hotlines for caregivers.
- Donate products and services to caregivers, such as books, toys, art supplies, safety equipment (such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits), food discounts, healthy snacks, bus passes, admission to museums, theaters and community events, printing, diapers, and more.

What Policy Makers and Funders Can Do

Facilitate Learning

Convene scholars, advocates, community organizations, parents and caregivers to learn more about family, friend and neighbor care and how to improve its quality.

Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to improve the quality of family, friend and neighbor care.

Disseminate information on effective strategies to peers and colleagues to increase understanding and support.

Provide Support

Convene and fund collaboratives that create new community connections.

Encourage early learning system development leaders to include strategies to help family, friend and neighbor caregivers in their efforts.

Encourage current and future grantees to help parents and caregivers of young children in appropriate ways.

Fund evaluations of model programs and strategies.

Support information sharing and activities that bring caregivers together for support and respite.

Conclusion

This report and initiative represent a first step toward addressing family, friend and neighbor care as a school readiness and work force development issue and identifying roles that employers and other community partners can play to address these critical issues. Yet this step, and other research on this topic cry out for additional investigation to test and document solutions and to explore a wide range of policy questions, such as:

Does improving the quality increase the stability of family, friend and neighbor care?

What is the best way to increase the stability of family, friend and neighbor care?

What strategies to help family, friend and neighbor caregivers work best and why?

What are the policy implications of addressing these issues in the contexts of school readiness, economic and community development, workforce development and civic engagement?

Where do supports for family, friend and neighbor caregivers fit in an early learing system?

What do various supports cost and how can they be funded?

And so this report ends with more questions, offered in the hope that they will inspire employers, policy makers, funders, community leaders and others to continue to seek and share new answers.

What Connections Can You Make in Your Community?

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Appendices: Tools for Making Connections

Think of the ideas on the following pages as ingredients to choose from to make the right recipe for building connections in your community. Because every community has a different array of potential partners, needs and resources, each community's recipe for success will be unique.

Potential Partners for Making Connections in Your Community

Child Care Programs, Before/After School Programs and Preschool and Head Start Programs
Child Care Resource and Referral Organizations
Civic Groups (Junior Leagues, Urban Leagues, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, etc.)
Colleges, Universities and Training Centers
Community Centers and Settlement Houses
Cooperative Extension Services
Ecumenical Partnerships
Faith Communities
Family Child Care Associations
Family Support Centers, Programs and Coalitions
Funders
Government (state, county and municipal)
Grandparents
Hospitals, Clinics and Health Outreach Programs
Housing Authorities and Developers
Libraries
Media Outlets (print and electronic)
Museums
PTA's and Parent Councils
Parks and Recreation Facilities
Pediatricians
Policy Makers
Public Health Departments
Retailers and Other Employers
Schools
Senior Centers and Programs
Shopping Malls
Transportation Authorities and Programs
United Ways
United Way Success By 6 Initiatives
Volunteer Centers
Youth Groups (Girl and Boy Scouts, YMCAs, YWCAs, Campfire, Boys and Girls Clubs, school groups, etc.)
Who else can you think of?

What Community Partners Can Do	Provide Access to Books and Learning Materials	Provide Caregiver Connections and Learning including Meeting Space	Provide Information about Community Events	Provide Child Development Information	Offer Respite, Recognition and Fellowship	Arrange/Provide Transportation to Libraries, Museums and Community Events or Bring Library and Museum Resources to Providers	Enhance Learning Environments and Facilities
Child Care Programs, Before/After School Programs and Preschool and Head Start Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Child Care Resource and Referral Organizations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Department Stores	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
Civic Groups (Junior Leagues, Urban Leagues, Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis Clubs, etc.)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colleges, Universities and Training Centers	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Community Centers and Settlement Houses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cooperative Extension Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ecumenical Partnerships	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Family Child Care Associations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

What Community Partners Can Do	Provide Access to Books and Learning Materials	Provide Caregiver Connections and Learning Including Meeting Space	Provide Information about Community Events	Provide Child Development Information	Offer Respite, Recognition and Fellowship	Arrange/Provide Transportation to Libraries, Museums and Community Events or Bring Library and Museum Resources to Providers	Enhance Learning Environments and Facilities
Family Support Centers, Programs and Coalitions							
Firefighters							
Funders and Policy Makers							
Government (federal, state, county and municipal)							
Grandparents							
Hospitals, Clinics and Health Outreach Programs							
Housing Authorities and Developers							
Libraries							
Media Outlets (print and electronic)							
Museums							
Newspapers							
PTA's and Parent Councils							
Parks and Recreation Facilities							
Pediatricians							

What Community Partners Can Do	Provide Access to Books and Learning Materials	Provide Caregiver Connections and Learning Including Meeting Space	Provide Information about Community Events	Provide Child Development Information	Offer Respite, Recognition and Fellowship	Arrange/Provide Transportation to Libraries, Museums and Community Events or Bring Library and Museum Resources to Providers	Enhance Learning Environments and Facilities
Public Health Departments	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Retailers and Other Employers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Schools and Pre-schools	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Senior Centers and Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Shopping Malls	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Spanish and Other Non-English Language Radio Stations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Transportation Authorities and Programs						✓	
United Ways		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
United Way Success By 6 Initiatives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban Leagues	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Volunteer Centers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Youth Groups (Girl and Boy Scouts, YMCAs, YWCAs, Campfire, Boys and Girls Clubs, school groups, etc.)	✓				✓		✓

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Endnotes

1 Families and Work Institute (FWI) conducted one of the first studies of this type of early childhood setting, *The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care: Highlights of Findings* (1994), which examined relationships among quality and regulation, family income, costs, provider turnover, mothers' satisfaction and children's development. The study also led FWI to identify the concept of intentionality as a key quality indicator.

2 E. Galinsky, C. Howes, S. Kontos, and M. Shinn. *The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care: Highlights of Findings* (Families and Work Institute, 1994).

3 Bank Street College of Education has published a number of studies including: T. Porter. *Just Like Any Parent: The Child Care Choice of Welfare Mothers in New Jersey* (1991); T. Porter. *Neighborhood Child Care: Family, Friends, and Neighbors Talk about Caring for Other People's Children* (1998); and T. Porter, and R. Rice. *Lessons Learned: Strategies for Working with Kith and Kin Caregivers* (2000).

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9 E. Galinsky. *Ask The Children* (2000). *Ask The Children* underscored the need to move from either/or to both/and thinking in order to effectively address contemporary work life issues.

10 A. C. Emlen, P. E. Koren, and K. H. Schultze. *From a Parent's Point of View: Measuring the Quality of Child Care.* (Oregon Child Care Research Partnership, 1999).

11 R. N. Brandon, E. J. Maher, J. M. Joesch, and S. Doyle. *Understanding Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care in Washington State: Developing Appropriate Training and Support* (2002).

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